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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 002382

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: FATA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS RESIGN GOVERNMENT  
POSITIONS

Classified By: CDA Gerald M. Feierstein, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 30, PolCouns met with Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Members of the National Assembly (MNA) Munir Khan Orakzai and Shaukat Ullah, and their colleague FATA Senator Rasheed Ahmed. The meeting followed the recent announcement by three federal ministers and two parliamentary secretaries from FATA (including Shaukat Ullah) that they are resigning from government. The group resigned citing several reasons, including the government's failure to adequately address the problems facing the FATA. The three FATA parliamentarians with whom PolCouns met confirmed that the government officials who resigned on September 28 are part of a larger group of 15 FATA MNAs and Senators--themselves included--who have decided to end their support of the government and instead have aligned with the leading opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Orakzai confirmed that this FATA parliamentary group would sit with PML-N on the opposition benches and vote with it in the event of a no confidence vote on the government. These resignations may indeed be the opening gambit of a power play by PML-N's Nawaz Sharif; however, we understand that the FATA group has a meeting scheduled with President Zardari on October 2. If he manages to satisfy their demands, we suspect the group will be back in PPP's corner, at least for now. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On September 28, it was reported that Environment Minister Hamidullah Jan Afridi, Zakat and Usher Minister Noorul Haq Qadri, State Minister for Northern Areas Abdul Razaq, and parliamentary secretaries Javed Hussain and Shaukat Ullah tendered their resignation to Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani. While the five will be resigning their government positions, they will not be resigning their seats in the National Assembly. According to the press reports, PM Gilani declined to accept their resignations pending President Asif Zardari's return to Pakistan from his latest trip abroad.

¶3. (U) The group reportedly cited the government's failure to adequately address the problems of the FATA, the incompetence of the North West Frontier Province Governor, Owais Ahmed Ghani, who oversees FATA's administration, and the deteriorating security situation in the region as reasons for their decision to resign.

¶4. (C) Consulate Peshawar notes that the resignations of Afridi and Khan may be linked to pressure from Mangal Bagh and his Lashkar-e-Islam terrorist group. Afridi and Khan both reportedly promised Bagh they would prevent Pakistani military action against the group and had to pay compensation when security forces began operations in Khyber Agency, FATA. FATA MNAs also are upset that NWFP Governor Ghani ignored their recommendations when appointing a new Political Agent for Khyber (the most lucrative in terms of revenue of all the seven FATA agencies). Most of the group also disagrees with the proposed nomination of retiring LtGen Hamid Khan to be

the new governor of NWFP.

¶15. (C) In a September 30 meeting with PolCouns, Munir Khan Orakzai--the Parliamentary Leader of the FATA members in the National Assembly--FATA MNA Shaukat Ullah, who was among the FATA group that tendered its resignation, and FATA Senator Rasheed Ahmed reiterated their displeasure with the government's performance in FATA, listing an inventory of long-standing grievances.

¶16. (C) Orakzai accused the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of "lying" and going back on its word when it comes to helping FATA. He said the government has both failed to fully disburse funds to FATA under the current budget and to increase FATA's budget as it has repeatedly promised. Orakzai also charged that the government does not equitably compensate families of victims of terrorism in FATA when compared with compensation to families in other regions. Orakzai and his colleagues were also unhappy with the performance of NWFP Governor Ghani, whom they criticized for being incompetent and uninterested in issues related to FATA. (Note: Despite these grievances, Ullah praised the Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program as a successful initiative which has benefited residents of FATA because the aid goes directly to the people. End Note.)

¶17. (C) Orakzai confirmed that the five FATA MNAs who resigned from government are part of a larger group of 15 FATA MNAs and Senators who have decided to withdraw their support from the government. (Note: There are currently a total of 19 members of the National Assembly who are from FATA, 11 MNAs and eight Senators. Per the Pakistani Constitution, FATA is designated 20 seats in the National Assembly, however, one seat remains vacant. End Note.) Orakzai stated the four FATA parliamentarians who are not part of their group have decided to remain with either the PPP or the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F). During the course of the conversation, Orakzai and his colleagues further revealed that the FATA group will be aligning itself with the PML-N. When asked by PolCouns if this meant that they would be sitting with the PML-N on the opposition benches, Orakzai and his colleagues said they would. And, more importantly, they would be voting with the PML-N in a no confidence vote on the government, "when the time comes," Orakzai emphasized.

¶18. (C) Comment: With the recent move to reorganize its party and hold intra-party elections by March 2010, and now an alliance with FATA National Assembly members, the PML-N increasingly appears to be gearing up for a political showdown with the PPP, which may include a push for mid-term elections. Nevertheless, PML-N members repeatedly deny, both publicly and privately, that they want mid-term elections. It should also be noted that with the recent extension of the Political Parties Act which now allows FATA members of the National Assembly to select a party of affiliation, it is not surprising that these 15 FATA members have decided to align with the PML-N; however, they have not yet declared that they have formally joined the PML-N.

¶19. (C) This is the first time that FATA MNAs have come together as a group to exert political pressure in this way, and moving over to the opposition would be a dramatic step; previously, any ruling party in Islamabad could count on the support of the non-aligned FATA parliamentarians because they have no other avenue to obtain development funds or other perks. In Peshawar, local politicians credit Orakzai's personal leadership of what is a generally young group of parliamentarians for orchestrating this resignation attempt. It may indeed be the opening gambit of a power play by Nawaz Sharif; however, we understand that the FATA group has a meeting scheduled with President Zardari on October 2. If he manages to satisfy their demands, we suspect the group will be back in PPP's corner, at least for now. End Comment.